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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 001110

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TAGS: [PARM](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [IS](#) [EG](#)
SUBJECT: GAZA BORDER VISIT: GOE BRIEFING AND TOUR

REF: A. CAIRO 970
[1](#)B. CAIRO 777 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: DCM Stuart Jones for reason 1.4 (b).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: Senior LAWIO officers guided a GOE-sponsored Congressional staff on a tour along the Egypt-Gaza border May 26. In an introductory briefing, LAWIO Chief MG Nagy Kamal told us that the GOE has been making recent progress on discovering and destroying tunnel openings. He said that the smuggling of "Katusha" rockets into Israel takes place primarily via the sea, not under the border. MG Nagy predicted that if the Rafah Crossing were re-opened consistent with the 2005 Access and Movement Agreement, the smuggling would "disappear." On a full tour of the Gaza border, we viewed the recently completed GOE stone and concrete wall and visited an elevated Border Guard Force position overlooking Gaza. We could see war-damaged buildings in Palestinian Rafah, as well as new construction. LAWIO officers showed us two recently destroyed tunnel openings, and explained to us how the tunnels are concealed. End summary.

Initial LAWIO Briefing

[1](#)2. (S) In an initial briefing, LAWIO Chief MG Nagy said that the cross-border tunnels between Gaza and Egypt are too small to transport "Katusha" rocket parts, and that Iran smuggles such rockets into Gaza via the sea. MG Nagy said that Egypt has been making progress on discovering and destroying tunnel openings in Egyptian Rafah and noted that the GOE had discovered 5 tunnels on May 14. He said that the GOE has discovered smuggled goods, such as food, fuel, medicine, spare parts, cigarettes, hard currency and illicit drugs, as well as ammunition, explosive belts and mines. Nagy claimed that the GOE has discovered 92 tunnel openings thus far in 2008, compared with 115 openings throughout all of 2007.

[1](#)3. (S) Nagy said that the GOE needs an additional regiment of Border Guard Forces (BGFs) to effectively secure the border. Describing the border problems as a "political issue," he contended that the cross-border smuggling attempts would continue as long as Israel limits the movement of humanitarian goods into Gaza. He predicted that if the Rafah border crossing were re-opened consistent with the terms in the 2005 Agreement on Access and Movement, "the smuggling would disappear." MG Nagy described the situation on the border as "calm, but tense" due to frequent Palestinian demonstrations demanding that Egypt open the Rafah crossing. In a separate conversation, a senior LAWIO officer told us that Palestinians conduct peaceful demonstrations of this sort most Fridays after prayers, and that there are usually about 200 demonstrators holding Palestinian, not Hamas flags. LAWIO officers described their liaison efforts with Israeli counterparts as consistently productive, and said that the

new Israeli working-level point of contact who assumed his post in April, Col. Shai Brovander, has been effective.

A Tour Along the Border

¶4. (C) LAWIO began the tour at the northwest corner of the border along the Mediterranean Sea, at Border Stone One. To arrive at the sea, we drove along the Egyptian military access road which lies in front of the newly GOE-built stone and concrete wall and behind a concentina-wire barrier. The wire barrier stops about 20 yards from the sea. At the point where the access road stops atop a sand dune about 50 yards from the sea, we could see make-shift Hamas observation posts directly across the wire barrier. Plain-clothes GOE EGIS and DMI guards stood between us and the wire barrier brandishing AK-47s toward Gaza. Contrary to what we have seen on previous visits, there were no Hamas fighters across the border at this point, indicating communication and coordination between BGF soldiers and Hamas. Looking out to the sea, we could see one Egyptian patrol boat deployed about 1.5 kilometers off-shore to the northwest. About 5 kilometers to the northeast, we saw an Israeli naval vessel on patrol. On the beach, the GOE kept a rigid-hull, inflatable patrol boat ready, flanked by BGF sailors.

¶5. (C) Driving south-east along the border, we could see damaged apartment buildings and the remains of greenhouses from an Israeli settlement across the Philadelphi corridor. After Border Stone Two, the Philadelphi Corridor narrows considerably to about 50 yards. At this point, we drove in

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front of the Egyptian pontoon barriers filled with stones and metal pushed up against the wire fence. The Egyptian stone and concrete wall behind the access road has openings at its top every 50 meters where Egyptian BGFs were stationed with machine guns. The wall also has ramps built in behind it, which enable Armored Personnel Carriers to drive up and park atop the wall, where BGFs sat with heavy machine guns pointed into Gaza. In other places atop the wall, heavily-armed BGFs sat in sand bag-fortified pillboxes looking out into Gaza. At one point, the stone and concrete wall ends at the wall of a mosque, before beginning again on the mosque's other side. LAWIO officers told us that the mosque is still in use. We saw that the Egyptian stone and concrete wall extends the entire length of the Gaza border, with only a few small gaps.

¶6. (C) Looking out across the Philadelphi corridor into Palestinian Rafah between Border Stones 2 and 4, we could see a mostly desolate scene of partially damaged buildings, abandoned vehicles and debris. Flags -- mostly Palestinian, but a good number of Hamas and Fatah ones as well -- adorned the tops of several apartment buildings. The only Palestinian civilians we saw along this stretch of the border were a group of four youths walking, and a man riding a donkey cart with his two children who waved at our vehicle. We observed several makeshift Hamas viewing outposts, most of which were empty, but a few of which appeared to be manned by Hamas fighters. We passed one empty Hamas outpost that appeared to be less make-shift that included enclosed rooms and possibly bathroom facilities. All along the Palestinian side of the border, we saw that Hamas had either partially or completely destroyed the Israeli-built wall, except for the section protecting the Palestinian Rafah terminal, and a few other small sections.

¶7. (C) LAWIO officers took us to a BGF outpost on the third floor balcony of an abandoned building looking out into Gaza, about 600 yards south of Border Stone 4. LAWIO planned to take us to a similar outpost further north, but demurred, saying, "Hamas is getting too excited on the other side of the border." Three BGF soldiers armed with heavy machine guns manned the sandbagged balcony outpost overlooking a damaged residential section of Palestinian Rafah across the

Philadelphi corridor. From the outpost, we could see Palestinian workers in Rafah constructing what appeared to be greenhouses. Looking through BGF high-powered binoculars, we could see bullet-pocked and partially destroyed apartment buildings, some of which were clearly inhabited, as laundry hung drying from the windows. LAWIO officers said that the buildings were damaged in Israeli raids immediately prior to the 2005 disengagement and in continuing Israeli Air Force strikes in Gaza. Through the binoculars, we could see children playing in the dusty streets.

Tunnels

18. (C) LAWIO officers showed us a tunnel opening they said the GOE had destroyed May 23 in an olive grove 500 yards south of the BGF outpost we visited, and approximately 350 yards from the Philadelphi Corridor; the officers said they had not discovered any contraband in the tunnel. They said the GOE is prosecuting the owners of the grove whom the Egyptians believe are responsible for constructing the tunnel. LAWIO said that an olive tree had concealed the tunnel opening, and that BGF soldiers had located the tunnel location through intelligence. The destroyed tunnel opening was about 20 yards from a private family home, but LAWIO said that the GOE is not holding the family responsible.

19. (C) LAWIO officers showed us a second destroyed tunnel opening about 10 yards from the Egyptian-Israeli border fence at the Kerem Shalom crossing. The officers displayed digging implements and GPS equipment to determine geographical coordinates that they said were found in the tunnel. The Kerem Shalom terminal was empty and locked, as it has been since the April 19 Hamas VBIED attack; we could see an Israeli watch tower at the terminal blackened from the attack, which appeared to be under repair.
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